34th Congress, 1st Session. } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. { Ex. Doc. No. 124.

CENT COINAGE.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

IN REFERENCE TO

Alterations in the cent coinage.

July 16, 1856.—Referred to the Committee of Ways and Means.

Treasury Department, *July* 15, 1856.

Sir: I have the honor to enclose a copy of a letter received from the Director of the mint, in relation to the proposed alteration of the cent coinage, and would respectfully recommend the alterations in the bill as proposed by the Director. Twelve specimens of the coins referred to by the Director are also enclosed.

I am, very respectfully,

JAMES GUTHRIE,
Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. N. P. Banks, Jr.,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Mint of the United States,
Philadelphia, July 11, 1856.

Sir: In a former communication respecting an alteration of the cent coinage I took occasion to say that I had requested the melter and refiner to prosecute further experiments, with a view to the ascertainment of the most suitable alloy for that coinage. These experiments were not completed—chiefly because the mint was in a dismantled condition—when the bill relating to the coinage of cents was prepared, in the 5th section of which it was proposed to allow the proportion of metals in the new coin to be determined hereafter, in the manner therein stated. Subsequently, the department and the

Finance Committee of the Senate deemed it proper that the proportion of metals should be authoritatively fixed by law, whereupon the section was amended as the bill subsequently passed the Senate, in which it is enacted that the proportion of other metals than copper shall not exceed *five per cent.*

Recent experiments have induced us to prefer an alloy in which the proportion of other metal than copper shall be greater than is above stated—namely, an admixture in which in every hundred parts of weight of metal there shall be *eighty-eight* of copper and *twelve* of nickel. This alloy seems to possess all the desirable characteristics for a cent piece. I have accordingly caused some specimens to be struck, fifty pieces of which I send you by Mr. Colmesnil, an agent of the department. To prevent expense and delay we have used the half-cent dies. The specimens will show that the mixture receives a good impression from the dies, and exhibits its color and general appearance.

It will be seen that, in its external character, it differs entirely from gold, silver, and copper, preserving the pure red tone of the latter, with the light color of nickel. The color is peculiar, and it is believed will be more acceptable than any of the gray-white or brassy mixtures, or that in which the copper more largely prevails; for it seems to be desired by the public that not only a smaller cent than the one now in circulation should be struck, but that we should get rid of copper, on account of its liability to blacken and become foul.

The infusion of twelve per cent. of nickel—which is a metal of considerable value—elevates the character of the material, and, besides the advantages of color and general appearance, will enable us to make the cent of less weight, and, at the same time, preserve some just proportion between the intrinsic and the nominal value of the coin. The present legal cent weighs one hundred and sixty-eight grains; the specimens I send you weigh about seventy-two grains, and I propose *that* as a proper weight. It gives a sufficient seigniorage, and is represented by a convenient decimal—namely, fifteen (15) hundredths of an ounce—which will afford a proper facility in the calculations of the mint—they being kept, as you are aware, in troy ounce and decimals of the ounce.

The value of the metal, in rolled sheets, is fifty-four cents per pound; the piece to weigh seventy-two grains, (fifteen hundredths of an ounce,) the seigniorage, without estimating the cost of cutting and striking, would be eighty per cent. This is considerably *less* than the seigniorage on the pieces as proposed by the bill as it passed the Senate, but it is large enough to effect the re-coinage contemplated, and the withdrawal of the small Spanish coin and old cents, as is provided in other parts of the proposed law.

I cannot speak with certainty, in the absence of actual trials, of the effect of *wear* and *keeping* on the color of the metal; but it will certainly tarnish less from keeping than the alloy which is proposed in the bill which passed the Senate, and far less than pure copper; and in the pocket it will probably maintain nearly the color which it now presents, becoming rather of a darker reddish hue. It cannot be easily imitated by the cheaper brass or bronze, as these have a de-

cided yellow, instead of red, tone, and I know of no other alloy which can readily be substituted for it.

To carry into effect the views herein presented it will be necessary to amend the Senate bill now pending in the House in the 5th section, by striking out "ninety-six grains, or two-tenths of any ounce," and insert *seventy-two grains, or fifteen hundredths of an ounce;* strike out "four grains," and insert *three grains*, (as that will be a sufficient remedy for the diminished piece); and strike out "five per centum in weight of metals," and insert *one-eighth in weight of other metals.*

The section would then read as follows:

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That the standard weight of the cent coined at the mint shall be seventy-two grains, or fifteen hundredths of one ounce, troy, with no greater deviation than three grains in each piece; that said cent shall be composed of copper, with an admixture not exceeding one-eighth in weight of other metals, which may render it more suitable for the purposes of coinage, and of such shape and device as may be fixed by the Director of the mint, with the approbation of the Secretary of the Treasury.

I submit this matter to your consideration, and for such action upon it as you may deem expedient.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your faithful servant,

JAMES ROSS SNOWDEN,
Director of the Mint.

Hon. JAMES GUTHRIE,
Secretary of the Treasury, Washington City.